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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Respecialization in Special Education (RISE) program, which helps noncertified special education teachers in Hawaii earn their endorsement for certification. The program was developed to address the shortage of special education teachers experienced by school systems both nationally and locally. The alternative teacher training program attempts to both alleviate the critical shortage of qualified special education teachers and enhance the long-term retention of trained teachers. Major characteristics of the program are: (1) its unified and systematic approach; (2) its usage of 20 all-day seminars covering curriculum and instruction, classroom management, foundations of special education, and professional development; (3) its supervised field experience using resource teachers as mentors; and (4) its centralized training delivery despite geographic separation, via the Hawaii Interactive Television System. Formative and summative evaluation is built into the program and has indicated a pass rate of 82 percent on the National Teachers Examination Special Education Area Test. Expansion of the program is being considered. (DB)

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An Overview of the

RESPECIALIZATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION (RISE) PROGRAM

An Alternative Certification Program

Hawaii State Department of Education
Office of Personnel Services
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Paper presented at the March 1-4, 1995
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Respecialization in Special Education (RISE):

An Alternative Certification Program

Department of Education (DOE)

State of Hawaii

Introduction.

This paper was presented on March 4, 1995, at the "It Takes More Than Magic" International Conference in Orlando, Florida. This conference, held from March 1 to March 4, 1995, was sponsored by the Learning Disability Association (LDA). This paper presented an overview of an alternative certification program, called the Respecialization in Special Education (RISE) program, which has been training noncertified special education teachers in Hawaii classrooms since the Fall of 1991. This paper presentation described an on-going program that currently helps noncertified special education teachers earn their endorsement for certification in the State of Hawaii.

Overview.

This overview looked at four facets of the RISE Program. The first facet defined the *problem* that gave the RISE program its reason for being. The second facet described the *solution* to this problem that led to the program's creation and development. The third facet looked at the *program's characteristics* that have made the RISE Program unique among alternative certification programs across the country. The overview ends with a brief summary of program *evaluation results* designed to help determine the program's benefits to the DOE, and identify problems and possible solutions to help improve the training program.

Problem.

The problem underlying the RISE program's existence is the shortage of special education teachers experienced by school systems both nationally and locally. According to the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP, 1990), there were roughly 26,800 special education teachers needed nationally. Additionally, the proportion of noncertified special education teachers in some mainland schools reached forty percent of the special eduation workforce. In the State of Hawaii the proportion of noncertified special education teachers in special education classrooms is roughly twenty-five percent from year to year (DOE, 1992). In a nutshell, the problem is simply a supply-demand one in which supply is not meeting Hawaii's demand for appropriately trained and qualified special education teachers.

Shortage Factors.

Teachers are leaving the special education ranks faster than anticipated due to planned retirements coupled with state-generated incentive programs for early retirement. Planned and early retirements consistently create large numbers of projected vacancies at the beginning of each schoolyear. The difficulty in filling the projected vacancies is exacerbated by the attrition of teachers from the special education career field to counseling, general education, and school administration career areas. The loss of experienced, certified special education teachers far exceeds the gains from traditional sources of trained special education teachers.

The cost-of-living in Hawaii also contributes to the general exodus of professionals from the State of Hawaii, including teachers. Lower cost areas such as Nevada, Arizona, Texas, and Florida provide attractive alternatives to high living-costs in Hawaii.

Long-Term Measure.

The long-term solution has always been the University of Hawaii, the primary special education degree-granting institution in Hawaii. But with an annual output from ten to fifteen graduates each year, the University is unable to meet the DOE's entire need for special education teachers. The Hawaii DOE (1991) has indicated a need for about a hundred forty-five special education teachers each year for the next ten years. Since that need will not likely be met by the University, other measures have had to be effected to offset the annual deficits in the placement of qualifed special education teachers.

Temporary Measures.

Mainland recruiting has had some success. Each year Hawaii DOE representatives visit mainland campuses, participate in professional conferences and attend job fairs to hold interviews of prospective treacher candidates. Based upon these interviews, job offers are made and some agreements signed. While some recruited teachers enjoy their Hawaii teaching jobs and renew their teaching contracts, others return to the mainland due to the high cost-of-living or inability to adjust to the climate, culture or insularity of the islands. Not a long-term solution, mainland recruiting is a very expensive measure for the Hawaii DOE.

The Hawaii DOE hires non-certified special education teachers of two types. The majority of Hawaii's noncertified special education teachers are those who are certified to teach in some education specialty other than special education , e.g., regular education. While certified in math, science or history, they are not certified for special education classrooms. The other category of noncertified special education teachers are temporary contract teachers who have a baccalaureate (or higher) degree but no teacher training or education degree. Together these teachers form a pool special education teachers who have no formal training in special education teaching but are responsible for teaching Hawaii's youth with disabilities. Together they make up about twenty-five percent of the special education workforce in Hawaii classrooms.

Solution.

This untenable situation forced the Hawaii DOE to consider a long-term, solution to the chronic teacher-shortage problem. The long-term solution was determined to be an alternative teacher training program designed to train noncertified special education teachers in the appropriate knowledge, abilitites and skills of special education teachers.

The objectives of this training program were to: 1) alleviate the critical shortage of qualified special education teachers, and through improved teaching satisfaction and success, 2) enhance the long-term retention of these trained teachers. The primary goal of the program, however, has always been to provide quality instruction to Hawaii's students with disabilties.

Program Characteristics.

The RISE Program shares many characteristics with other alternative certification programs, but it simultaneously has traits that give the program a unique character of its own. Described below are the major characteristics of the program.

Unified, systematic training. The RISE program was created to be a formal, unified, systematic program of training, i.e., it was not intended to be a disjointed series of periodic workshops. Rather, it is based upon a centrally developed curriculum and syllabus of seminar coursework, much like that of a college program of study. The RISE Program is both seminar- and field-based in nature.

Seminar-based. Seminars are based on formal coursework, complete with textbooks, quizzes, tests, assignments and projects. Participants attend 20 all-day seminars on alternating Saturdays each year for a total 160 classroom hours. Seminars begin in September and end in June. Seminar content includes:

1) Curriculum and Instruction (e.g., lesson planning, teaching strategies, instructional materials, evaluation, and lesson delivery).

2) Classroom Management (e.g., behavior management, rules and procedures, reinforcement techniques, student motivation, and classroom management strategies).

3) Foundations of Special Education (e.g., legal and historical foundations of special education, federal and state guidelines in teaching students with disabilities, learning styles and characteristics, modifications needed to tailor instruction to students with disabilties).

4) Professional Development (e.g., working with professionals and parents, improving communication and interpersonal relation skills, managing time and stress to reduce the risk of burnout, and learning new innovations in instruction and instructional materials).

The greater portion of instructional content was taught by RISE resource teachers and other DOE personnel. Non-DOE guest speakers from the mainland and local area provided the remainder of instruction.

Supervised Field Experience. Coursework and seminars are equally balanced with opportunities to learn in the classroom setting. Resource teacher mentors observe the RISE teachers in their classrooms and provide constructive suggestions for improving lesson planning, behavior & classroom management techniques, and instructional delivery skills. Visits are conducted on a regularly scheduled basis, as much as weekly (or more often) for those who need the added attention. Supervised field training is an integral part of the RISE training program and focuses on the application of seminar content in the actual classroom.

Centralized Training Delivery. RISE teachers are geographically separated by water and linked only by scheduled airline flights. It is too expensive to fly all of the RISE teachers to a central location, and it is not logistically feasible to have instruction delivered by a team at each island. Neither is it effective to delgate each of the districts with the responsibility of presenting instruction because there would be no assurance of continuity or uniformity of instruction across disticts. The solution to this geographic problem was found in the Hawaii Interactive Television System (HITS). HITS became the RISE program's means of providing centralized instruction to geographically separated teachers. HITS is an interactive system in which teachers on one island can communicate directly with those on the other islands. This system allows geographically separated teachers to learn as if they are in one large classroom, ensuring that instructional content and activities are uniform across all islands and that participants share common experiences.

Program Evaluation.

The RISE Program was established with a formal evaluation program in place. The evaluation was designed to accomplish two things.

A *formative evaluation* was designed to provide the program director with feedback during the conduct of the training. It gave the director information about the program's accomplishment of training goals, timeliness of milestone achievement, progress of teachers (protoges) through the training program, and emergence of any training problems along the way. The goal of the formative evaluation was to improve the conduct of training and make the training more effective by identifying problems and suggesting possible solutions along the way.

Some of the lessons learned along the way included the following examples. In 1991, the program abandoned its district-level deilvery of training in favor of a centralized delivery system via the HITS interative television system. Doing so assured the program of uniform and consisent training content across the geographically separated districts. In 1992, the RISE Program segregated the mixed group of teacher-trained participants from non-teacher trained participants and established a dual-track training program. In doing so the program developed separate training programs, tailoring the level and depth of instructional content to meet the different curriculum needs of the two categories of RISE teachers.

A *summative evaluation* was designed to look at the success or benefit of the RISE program. It tried to answer such questions as: "Did the program help reduce the number of noncertified teachers in Hawaii? Was the quality of RISE graduates equal to or higher in quality than traditionally certified teachers? Should the program continue or be discontinued based on its ability to meet program objectives and goals?"

Summative evaluation results indicated, for example, that of the 219 teachers who completed the program, 138 participants passed all training requirements, including passing the State's criterion of 600 scaled score points on the Special Education Area Test of the National Teachers Examination (NTE). The pass rate for those teachers who took the NTE was 82%. The average NTE score for all participants who took the national examination was 642 points, roughly one hundred points above the average criterion score for all states requiring the NTE for endorsement. The average NTE score for RISE participants would allow them to pass the certification criterion for every state in the union with the exception of Oregon with its 650 scaled score point criterion. Based upon the endorsement rate of the RISE Program, roughly 35 newly certified teachers each year, the RISE Program is becoming the primary means of filling the special education classroom with trained and qualified special eduation teachers. Based upon these results, the Hawaii State Board of Education has continued to support the RISE Program and its training mission. Survey data from school principals and other administrators provide additional support that the RISE Program was fulfilling an important function in providing quality education for Hawaii's students with disabilties.

Program Implications.

The RISE Program has proven itself to be a tried-and-tested means of training and certifying noncertified teachers for instruction in the special education classroom. It is now in its fourth year of implementation, and it continues to provide a statewide means of improving the quality of instruction for Hawaii's students with special needs. It enjoys the support of the State's educational leadership as well as its school administrators, and it remains a viable program despite the austerity of the State's budget projections each year.

There is growing interest in applying the RISE Program's training format in three other areas of the Hawaii DOE. The first area is in the training and certification of Hawaii's educational assistant (EA) paraprofessional. Hawaii's 1,300 EAs curently have no opportunity for uniform and systematic training to help them become qualified for career advancement. A training and certification program would greatly benefit the EA workforce and, more importantly, the students with whom they come in contact.

The second area is in the ranks of regular education teachers who, through mainstreaming, integration and inclusion, are coming more and more into direct contact with students with special needs. Most regular education teachers, however, have little or no special education knowledge or training to help them meet the educational needs of these students. The RISE Program's training format would provide the means of helping regular education teachers to acquire the needed knowledge and skills to properly instruct special education students in their classrooms.

The third area is in the ranks of a small group of DOE teachers in the Hawaiian Language Immersion Program. Many of these teachers, while proficient in the Hawaiian language, are not teacher trained or certified. A program of teacher training would help these noncertified teachers acquire the needed knowledge and skills to properly instruct their students in core courses using the Hawaiian language as the primary means of communication.

The RISE Program looks forward to the Fall 1995 group of noncertified teachers. It is projected to be the largest cohort since the Program's inception in 1991.

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